



It is evident that the world is becoming more social. As the social media wave evolves, we now see more organisations are adopting social networking technologies to turn the organisations into a new kind of business called a “social business”.

We can't deny that social media is transforming the way we live and work. It is also found that organisations that are harnessing social media in business are more competitive. Therefore, organisations should seek to embrace the trend and become social businesses where networks of people are facilitated to share content, information, expertise and collaborate in an open and sharing environment.

What Is a Social Business?

Some may think to become a social business simply means to have a Facebook page or a Twitter account for the organisation, but actually it is far more than that. According to IBM,

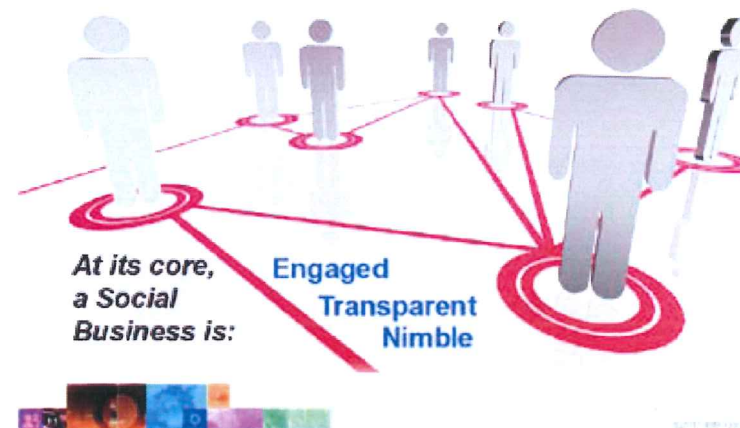
a social business is one that creates an environment to enable and encourage people to connect with one another to accomplish just about anything. In other words, a social business uses social networking tools to provide its people with a platform to connect, communicate and collaborate both internally and externally.

“But a social business is about more than collaboration. It's about applying social technologies to business processes in order to radically improve the way organisations operate,” says Mr. Sino Lum, Lotus Brand Manager, Software Group, IBM China/Hong Kong Limited. “A social business could put tools in the

hands of the human resources teams, enabling them to identify and assess talent and expertise, linking people with the right skills with the right opportunities, when and where they're needed. HR teams could also tap into social networks to proactively respond to issues before they escalate, fundamentally changing the way they work within an organisation, for the better.”

As told by Mr. Lum, according to the 2010 IBM Global CEO Study, 57 percent of companies who have invested in social business tools have out performed their peers citing collaboration as having a direct impact on their organisation's growth.

A Social Business embraces networks of people to create business value



Mr. Sino Lum, Lotus Brand Manager, Software Group, IBM China/Hong Kong Limited.

“We find that more organisations today are turning to social networking technologies for workforce transformation. As now there are more than 700 million Facebook users worldwide, I think organisations are about to learn the value of social media platform for use within the organisation,” he says.

What Are the Benefits?

In fact, organisations that successfully transform into a social business can potentially reap great benefits, including having the ability to deepen customer relationships, drive operational effectiveness and optimise the workforce. Mr. Lum reveals that IBM realised early the power of social business and has been adopting social technologies in driving workforce productivity, such as:

- Instantaneous sharing of feedback and key information
- Improvements in project management
- Better scheduling and task orientation
- Easy location of key experts and talents globally

“From our experience, we find that the adoption of social technologies enables an organisation to achieve higher employee satisfaction, better community participation, improved group discussions with all stakeholders, new customers relationships, and easy

access to the right expertise, which are all essential elements contribute to sustainable business success,” he continues.

Benefits of Becoming a Social Business

- ✓ Higher employee satisfaction
- ✓ Better community participation
- ✓ More effective communication
- ✓ Easy access to the right expertise

Since social media becomes more defined in the business world, human resources professionals now have an opportunity to leverage the powerful medium in many aspects of the business.

Sharing and Inspiring Ideas

“What's more important and relevant to HR professionals is that it offers a user-friendly yet highly interactive platform for HR to upload and share information and resources to achieve purposes such as learning, training and knowledge transfer, and move the practice upstream to bring out the voices, ideas, and innovations from everyone in the organisation. It also helps simplify work procedures and remove any obstacles that may hinder the employees from effective communication and connection,” says Mr. Lum.

No Geographical Limitation

As organisations nowadays are more global, people and teams are geographically distributed, which has made HR's work of finding and managing talent more difficult. With the use of social technologies, it breaks geographical limitation and enables HR professionals to identify key talent and expertise effectively.

“The way organisations recruit and manage talent has dramatically changed with the use of social technologies as they can capitalise on the relationships and connections that have already developed through the platform. What used to take months or even years now may only take a few days or weeks. Take IBM as an example. At IBM, staff can discuss internal matters which cannot be disclosed in the public on a social platform behind the corporate firewalls. Every staff has his/her own profile on the platform, so when HR people want to find a talent or a specific expertise, they will be able to identify it quickly without any geographical limitation,” Mr. Lum explains.

As Mr. Lum reveals, nowadays more and more organisations in Hong Kong are adopting social business solutions for workforce transformation, including banks, financial institutions, insurance companies or even semi-governmental organisations.



The popularity of social networking tools like Facebook urges organisations to turn to social technologies for workforce transformation.

“Becoming a social business enables an organisation to have a more social, engaging and transparent environment for effective sharing and communication, which helps manage the workforce in a more innovative way.”



Engaging Your People

Employee engagement is no doubt one of the most critical challenges facing organisations and HR professionals today. Can becoming a social business help companies engage their talent as well?

“Yes, it does. By becoming a social business, an organisation will be able to enjoy a work environment of high transparency with an atmosphere for diversity and inclusion, where the top management can have better understanding of the employees’ perspectives and thought. It also provides new staff with the opportunity to know more about the organisation, its corporate culture and their colleagues,” Mr. Lum answers.

With Gen Yers and the Millennials entering the workforce, HR professionals are challenged too when engaging these groups of young employees. “We need to understand that these young people are well versed in a social culture of transparency and sharing. They are used to communicating their status, seeking out others and getting feedback with the use of technology. Therefore, adopting social business technologies will definitely be helpful to HR professionals in handling the new generations of workers.”

Mr. Lum cites a previous case of an organisation and says, “The senior management of a factory that employs a lot of young workers find that they are not able to communicate with these young workers effectively. By adopting social business solution, the factory finds that communication with young staff is

improved, whilst the top management knows more about the needs and thinking of the young people.”

IBM’s Experience

When it comes to technologies, many would agree that IBM has been at the forefront. Indeed, the company is the world’s largest consumer of social technologies as well as the number one social software platform provider, moving itself into a new era of insight sharing and collaboration with a number of social business applications for various fields.

Human Resources

“In the aspect of human resources, we utilise social media for tech-enabled recruiting, employee education, sales training and leadership development. For example, we rely on social media for leadership development from an employee’s first day on the job. We also use it for new hires to be part of a social group for 6-12 months so they can get up to speed more quickly with other new hires, they network and acclimate more quickly,” he says.

Global Collaboration and Development

“Today, more than 130 communities of IBM professionals around the globe are collaborating virtually. This has reduced the time it would have taken to complete projects by 30 percent, increased re-use of ‘software assets’ by 50 percent, and cut component costs by 33 percent.”

Mr. Lum also points out that the company’s recent study of 700 Global Chief Human Resource

Officers found that financial outperformers are 57 percent more likely than underperformers to use collaborative and social networking tools to enable global teams to work more effectively together and 21 percent of companies have recently increased the amount they invest in the collaboration tools and analytics despite the economic downturn. We can see how irresistible the trend of social business is.

How to Get Started?

At its core, explains Mr. Lum, a social business puts in place the ability to:

- **Engage** people in meaningful collaboration around the right content and expertise;
- **Reach** everyone with the right experience, to contribute across boundaries, anytime & anywhere;
- **Discover** new insights – inside and outside the enterprise – to make better decisions; and
- **Optimise** by learning from interactions and applying intelligence to the business.

For organisations making the transition to a social business, they could start with either of these four abilities. “They should first look at their business drivers and objectives. Make clear of what your organisation wants to achieve and then adopt solutions that most fit your needs. Organisations may also contact social business solution providers for consulting and guidance on how to get started,” Mr. Lum suggests. **A**